FAITH, HOPE, and CHARITY, COMPARED.

A

SERMON

On 1 CORINTH. xiii. 13.

Preached in Lady *Yester's*, EDINBURGH, *April* 19. 1761.

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1 CORINTH. xiii. 13.

And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, theſe three; but the greateſt of theſe is Charity.

THE moſt diſtant or ſuperficial view which any candid obſerver can take of mankind, will plainly diſcover, both from their frame and circumſtances, that they are formed for ſociety. The original determinations of their hearts are ſocial. The cool and unbiaſs'd dictates of reaſon preſcribe ſocial intercourſe as the nobleſt and moſt effectual method both of attaining improvement, and of ſecuring what is convenient or agreeable.

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The inſufficiency of every individual to procure all the accommodations neceſſary for his welfare, leaves him neither eaſe nor retreat, but in the embraces and protection of ſociety. But if particular neceſſities alone, were the cauſes of ſocial union, how ungraceful and awkward would it appear. Every man would be conſcious, that he could obtain no favour from his neighbour, without certain and immediate proſpects of its equivalent. If the hand of nature had not marked our plan of ſocial offices, what endleſs diſorder, what diſagreeable competitions would enſue? All the ſelfiſh deſires would operate with uncontrolled force and malignity; and wherever any perſon had power enough to ſuperſede, or cunning enough to elude the claims of his neighbour, no former favours could command, either by their number or their value, the ſmalleſt return; no obligations could extort the fainteſt acknowledgement. To prevent theſe inconveniencies, the wiſe and good God, the Author of every valuable

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and perfect gift, has interwoven with the very nature and eſſence of the human ſpirit, certain propenſities of love and tenderneſs towards all conſcious and reaſonable beings, in proportion to their worth and dignity. Allured by theſe delightful and attractive calls, man became willingly ſubſervient to man, and duty and happineſs were the ſame purſuit. Thus it appears, that charity is amongſt the faireſt of eternal Wiſdom's offspring, without which all the afflictions of life would become doubly unſupportable, and all its pleaſures would diminiſh both in number and force, till ſcarce any thing truly delightful or eligible remained.

THE word *Charity*, in common uſe, has conſiderably leſſened its original ſignification. For by charity at preſent, all generally mean no more than ſome particular degree or exertion of that univerſal and boundleſs benevolence, whoſe object is God and his works. It ſometimes expreſſes no more than that kind diſpoſition, whether felt or exerciſed, which

which prompts us to ſupply the wants of the poor. At other times it is limited to that favourable prepoſſeſſion for men in general, which impells us to put upon their conduct the moſt humane interpretation it will bear; which throws a ſhade over their infirmities, and ſets their virtues in the moſt advantageous light. But that none of theſe is the ſenſe of the Apoſtle, we may fairly conclude, both from the original word itſelf, from the importance and dignity attributed by him to that virtue, and from the various effects of it which he deſcribes. One would imagine, that in the fulneſs of his ſoul, he wiſhed to exhauſt all the powers of eloquence in its praiſe. He tells us, that though he were poſſeſſed of every prophetic talent, and every miraculous power, yet without charity he would be, What? Nothing. Though he could ſpeak with the tongues of men and angels, yet would theſe qualifications be no more valuable, than the unmeaning and uniform noiſe of a ſounding braſs, or tinkling cymbal. Though he ſhould give

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his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned, yet could theſe ſacrifices have no merit without charity. " Charity ſuffereth long and is kind, charity envieth not, charity vaunteth not itſelf, is not puffed up, doth not behave itſelf unſeemly, ſeeketh not her own, is not eaſily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth: Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. All knowledge whether natural or ſupernatural, of which we are at preſent ſuſceptible, ſhall be loſt in the full blaze of intellectual light, which we ſhall behold in Heaven. Faith ſhall end in viſion and hope in fruition. The human being is yet in its infancy; in proportion as it riſes in its progreſs to perfection, the objects of its aim will riſe in worth and dignity. *Now abideth faith, hope, charity, theſe three; but the greateſt of theſe is charity.* To obviate ſome difficulties which may occur from comparing other paſſages of the ſame Apoſtle with this, and to induce you to cultivate

tivate charity as much as poſſible, which is my principal deſign. I ſhall

1*ſt*, Give ſome account of the nature, uſe and ends of the three graces diſtinguiſhed in the text.

2*dly*, Show in what ſenſe and what reſpects charity may be preferred to faith and hope.

3*dly*, Expoſtulate with you to indulge the kind determinations of your nature, from the immediate delights which they inſpire, and the happy conſequences which they produce, both in this world and the next.

It was propoſed then, in the 1*ſt* place, to give ſome account of the three graces mentioned in the text, and theſe we ſhall take in the ſame order as we find them.

Faith in general, may be defined a rational and permanent conviction of the truth of any facts or principles whatever. But its

denomination

denomination will vary according to its object, its authority and its effects. That perſuaſion which depends on human teſtimony alone, may be called hiſtorical faith. That which depends on the authority of God, conveyed by ſuch channels as the nature of things, and courſe of providence render moſt proper, may be named religious or ſacred faith. That belief which riſes from abſtract reaſoning, and is converſant about objects that have no tendency to excite our active powers, may be termed logical. That aſſent which the underſtanding gives to ſuch truths as intereſt our ſentiments and affections, may be called active. Thus it appears, that faith is either ſpeculative or practical, human or divine. Divine faith, which is the ſubject of our preſent inquiry, may be defined a rational, permanent, and active conviction, reſulting either from the exerciſe of right reaſon, or from the diſcoveries of divine revelation, and comprehending all theſe truths concerning the nature and will of God, or the circumſtances and duty of man, which

are of importance both to our preſent and eternal happineſs. It muſt be a rational conviction, becauſe ſuch a one alone is adapted to the powers of a reaſonable nature. But tho' every object which is immenſe and incomprehenſible, will preſent the mind with different views and principles which it cannot explain; ſtill the conviction of its being, extent and operations will be rational, if the evidences which ſupport them are ſuch. It is not, therefore, unreaſonable to believe ſuch facts and principles as we cannot fully underſtand. Again, faith muſt be a ſteady and permanent conviction, becauſe this character eſſentially belongs to every true principle of action. For with regard to all things that are not merely contingent, that which is true to-day, muſt be true to-morrow, and for ever. Once more, divine faith muſt be an active conviction, becauſe purſuits neceſſarily depend on principles, and happineſs on purſuits. Now, as man is not only endued with contemplative, but active powers, his felicity muſt be ſuited to both; but moſt

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ſuitable to the faculties which are of greateſt importance in his frame, and theſe without all queſtion are active.

From this account of divine faith, it appears plainly comprehenſive of every moral or chriſtian virtue; and in this light the Apoſtle cannot be accuſed of exaggeration, when he tells us, that, by this principle alone, we are juſtified and ſaved; for the explication already given will inſtruct us, that faith is not a meer indifferent or indolent belief, but a powerful and vivid principle which actuates the whole ſoul; that it is not partial, nor confined to particular objects or principles, but includes every object and every principle in which the duty and happineſs of man are concerned; that it is not meerly ſupported by natural evidence, but firſt impreſſed, and continually nouriſhed by the immediate action of God upon the ſoul. Thus, then, juſtifying or ſaving faith, is a complication of all thoſe truths, whether regarding God or ourſelves, which it imports us to know.

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But as by a divine faith, we obtain a deep and lively perſuaſion, that all thoſe objects which regard our felicity are real; ſo by hope we acquire the agreeable and animating proſpect of enjoying them. Every one knows, that hope is a pleaſing ſentiment ariſing from probable views of poſſeſſing abſent good. The pleaſure therefore which it inſpires, and the force with which it operates, will increaſe as the value of the good purſued, or the probability of acquiring it increaſes. Now, that hope which is mentioned by the Apoſtle, aſpires at eternal and infinite good, and the probability on which it depends, ariſes from an indelible conviction of every truth which God requires of man to believe, and of every duty which he enjoins him to perform, together with the teſtimony of a good conſcience, and theſe internal evidences of divine favour which are felt and recognized by every real Chriſtian, but cannot be explained unleſs by appealing to the hearts and ſouls in which they reign. Thus faith is the ſubſtance or anti-

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cipation of things not ſeen, the evidence of thoſe enjoyments which are the objects of hope. Hope is like a glaſs which renders them viſible and brings them nearer to the intellectual eye. 'Tis active, unwearied, unextinguiſhable. It animates theſe efforts of the ſoul, which otherwiſe would be languid and feeble, by preſenting continually to her view bright ideas of the joy ſet before us, from which at every glance we imbibe new ſpirit and indefatigable vigour, to repel every difficulty, elude every ſnare, and conquer every enemy which may oppoſe us in our Chriſtian courſe.——Thus much for Faith and Hope.

CHARITY, as has been hinted before, is that univerſal love and complacency of which the object is no leſs than God and all his intelligent offspring, in proportion to their worth and dignity. It is diſtinguiſhed from amiable inſtincts, momentary impulſes, or favourable prejudices, by the diſintereſtedneſs of its nature, the univerſality of its extent,

tent, and its diſcrimination of objects according to their merits, relations or neceſſities. This virtue operates differently according to the different objects which at particular periods engage its attention. When its views are turned towards God, warmed with contemplating the beauty and perfection of his nature, it exerts itſelf in uniform ſentiments of admiration and love. It rejoices in his eternal and infinite beatitude. It aſſimilates the human to the divine character, and beholds with growing tranſport the features of its inſpirer's image, as they brighten in the ſoul. Conſcious of its pre-eminence and dignity, it improves with zeal and chearfulneſs every opportunity of teſtifying by its obedience, its love and gratitude to God. Its natural, proper and eſſential exerciſe, is either in maintaining delightful and ineffable intercourſe with God, or in offices of tenderneſs towards his creature man. Man, as poſſeſſing the powers of conſciouſneſs and reaſon, bears ſuch diſtinguiſhed features of divinity impreſſed on his frame, that charity beholds and loves the image of her heavenly Father in his children.

children. And who can behold and love, without diſcovering theſe divine ſentiments by ſuch endearing offices, and ſuch an engaging conduct as they inſpire. Hence the moſt ſupreme and exquiſite delight which it can taſte, is in ſupplying indigence, relieving pain, pitying and ſoftening infirmity, admiring and foſtering virtue. It avoids all difference or competition, and indulges no emulation, but the God-like emulation of doing good. To prevent the miſchievous effects of malevolence and ill-nature, to redreſs the calamities of injured merit, to adorn the face of ſorrow with ſmiles, to inveſtigate and cure the wounds of bleeding diſtreſs, Charity often reſigns her own rights with pleaſure.

THUS having touched, though with a careleſs hand, the moſt ſtriking features which diſtinguiſh this virtue, we cannot enter into a minute detail of all her amiable offſpring, nor ſhow how ſhe operates according to the different relations of ſocial-life.

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LET us therefore endeavour, in the *ſecond* place, to fix the limits of that faith which is here meant by the Apoſtle, and deduce from the character of theſe virtues, that ſuperior excellence which is aſcrib'd to charity above faith and hope.

IN the other writings of the Apoſtle Paul, we are informed, that without faith we cannot be acceptable to God; that faith is the native and only ſource from whence every inſtance of heroic virtue or ſublime piety diſcovered by the Patriarchs could flow; that by faith Abel offered the firſt ſacrifice, and was accepted; by faith Enoch mantained intimate communication with God, and was tranſlated into heaven; by faith Noah preached righteouſneſs to a degenerate world and built the ark; by faith Abraham left his kindred and his country, nay, even ſubdued the moſt endearing ties of nature, and reſigned to God that ſon, that only ſon whom he had given him: Conſcious that no natural obſtacle could obſtruct the divine power,

power, nor prevent the accompliſhment of that promiſe by which he was to obtain an heir of all the ſpiritual and temporal bleſſings which he had in view; he believed, and that belief, together with the actions and diſpoſitions which it produced, was accounted to him for righteouſneſs. By faith Moſes preferred the fate of a ſuffering people, to all the luxury, power and ſplendor of an Egyptian court. In ſhort, faith is the ſole cauſe of our juſtification; and accordingly, from the view which has been given of it, we find, that it produces and includes every moral excellence and every pious diſpoſition. Since therefore, charity itſelf is comprehended in faith, how ſhould it be preferable? In ſcripture, the word *faith* admits of very different acceptations. Sometimes it ſignifies no more than honour and probity in the ordinary commerce of life; ſometimes that aſſent which the underſtanding gives to truth in general ſupported by proper evidence: But in a particular manner, by faith we are to underſtand that knowledge and acqui-

eſcence of the ſoul in God, and in the truths of his goſpel, which the exerciſe of reaſon, the evidence of revelation, and the divine ſpirit produce; yet even of this there may be very different degrees. During the period of ſupernatural gifts and miracles, we find, that there were many who taught the doctrines of Jeſus, and diſpoſſeſſed devils in his name, without having that faith which could render them acceptable to God, or procure their eternal ſalvation. Now, to attainments like theſe, however extraordinary and ſurpriſing, charity muſt be eminently preferable. For that faith upon which miracles and ſupernatural gifts depended, either did not produce at any time, or at leaſt not uniformly, all thoſe genuine graces and virtues which are the native fruits of juſtifying faith.

But even tho' this divine principle ſhould be taken in its full extent, there are many reſpects in which charity may be allowed the pre-eminence. For tho' faith be the productive

ductive cauſe of charity, and in that view preferable, yet both hope and faith reſpect only ourſelves as their end; whereas, charity aſcertains our relation to God and his works; produces all theſe grand and munificent effects which render life agreeable in this world; and forms the reliſh of the ſoul for ſuch objects as muſt conſtitute her eternal happineſs. It is not faith, but charity which renders us enamoured of the divine character, by which we admire the perfections and rejoice in the happineſs of God; it is not faith, but charity, by which we ſympathiſe with our brethren, and partake all the ſentiments of pain or pleaſure which ariſe from their various circumſtances; it is not faith, but charity, by which we heighten the joys or redreſs the calamities of men.

CHARITY, then, is the immediate and eternal tie which connects the ſoul with God, and with his creatures: Faith and hope are only temporary graces, and when their end is obtained, their very exiſtence muſt ceaſe; for

for when the glory of God and joys of heaven become immediate objects of our perception, they can no longer be the objects of faith and hope. Then we do not believe but feel, we do not hope, but enjoy. But charity is inextinguiſhable, progreſſive, and immortal. While God himſelf exiſts, whilſt his perfections exhibit for ever new views of beauty and order to the rational ſoul, whilſt there remain other intelligent beings in the creation, poſſeſſed of moral excellence, and partaking moral happineſs, ſo long ſhall charity operate, ſo long ſhall it continue to be a ſource of boundleſs and everlaſting exultation in the human mind. Nay more; as far as finite minds are capable of admitting infinite objects, charity makes the happineſs of God and his creatures our own, even through endleſs duration. So that whether we regard its object, its end or effects, tho' faith, hope, and charity now abide, yet charity is the greateſt.

THUS having attempted to deſcribe theſe three Chriſtian graces, and to ſhow from the ideas of the former two, in what ſenſe the laſt obtains a higher rank, it remains, in the third place,

3*dly*, THAT I ſhould expoſtulate with you to indulge the kind determinations of your nature, from the immediate delights which they inſpire, and the happy conſequences which they produce both in this world and the next.

AND with this intention my deareſt brethren, how ſhall I addreſs you? How ſhall I obtain the neareſt and moſt effectual acceſs to your hearts? Would to God I could ſpeak the language of angels, and that my accents flowed with all the harmony of heaven; then might I ſpeak of charity in ſtrains that become her dignity and excellence, then might I transfuſe all her ſpirit through the ſouls of my audience, with the irreſiſtible force of ſeraphic eloquence. But, alas! if charity,

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by her own intrinſic beauty and perſuaſion, cannot recommend herſelf to our attention and indulgence, is there not much reaſon to fear that no other argument, no other addreſs will prevail.

TELL me, my brethren, have you never felt that moſt exalted and exquiſite delight which the human ſoul in its preſent ſtate can feel, the generous and diſintereſted joy of procuring or contemplating the happineſs of others? Did not ſuch a pleaſure expand, while at the ſame time it delighted all the powers of your ſoul? Were you ever better reconciled with yourſelves, or more conſcious of the excellence of your nature than when inſpired with ſuch worthy, ſuch divine ſentiments? Nay, tell me more. Is not the pleaſure which mingles with that compaſſion beſtowed by every uncorrupted heart on diſtreſs, more elegant, more refined, and even more delightful, than all the luxury of ſenſe or ambition? Shall the tumultuous and momentary tranſports of corporeal pleaſure,

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or even the vain and empty ſwellings of precarious and dangerous power, be put in competition with the ſafe, the uniform, the raviſhing joys of benevolence? Would a truly charitable man diveſt his ſoul one moment of theſe amiable feelings, for all the moſt exquiſite entertainments of a refined voluptuary? Would the charms of empire rival thoſe of benevolence in his eſteem? No, not for all that the ſun enlightens; not for all that the ſea ſurrounds; not for all that the ſky embraces, would he reſign, one ſingle inſtant, the tender impulſes of nature and conſanguinity, the generous raptures of reciprocal friendſhip, the capacious wiſh that pants and glows for univerſal good. Even the ſigh which purſues departed worth to Heaven, the ſympathetic tear which flows for a brother's diſtreſs, are to him more precious than the glare of pomp, the increaſe of poſſeſſion, or the allurements of pleaſure.

THE beauty, force and propriety of theſe diſpoſitions and habits will further appear,

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if we conſider them in oppoſition to inſenſibility or ſelfiſhneſs. The man of dull ſenſations and languid affections may perhaps be eaſy, but never happy in life. In every important tranſaction which engages the wiſhes or attention of mankind, he is neuter, indifferent, unconcerned: an equal ſtranger to the higheſt reliſh of delight, or to the moſt tormenting efforts of pain, his moments glide on in one undiverſified ſtream, which, inſtead of being tranſparent and active, becomes putrid and muddy; till at laſt, by the ſlowneſs of its courſe, it ends in abſolute ſtagnation. He may rather be ſaid to poſſeſs vegetable than conſcious and rational life. But this is a conſtitutional infirmity, and implies no degree of guilt: whereas the reaſoning brute, whoſe moſt extenſive wiſhes are confined to himſelf alone, feels the higheſt ſatisfaction which his contracted ſoul can enjoy, mingled with the horrors of remorſe, and the bitterneſs of ſelf-contempt. Poverty, with all the miſeries of its train, leaves us ſtill a ſenſe of inward worth and dignity, if

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we preſerve thoſe diſpoſitions, and cultivate thoſe ſentiments which adorn and improve the human character. But the wretch who knows no good, no intereſt except his own, is impotent even when inveſted with power, deſpicable even when arrayed in pomp, and indigent though loaded with affluence.

On the contrary, benevolence is ever rich with native and inherent treaſure; for, tho' the good man may not always have capacity, or opportunity, to effuſe the tenderneſs of his heart, in offices of liberality and kindneſs, yet, even the unaccompliſhed wiſhes, and abortive attempts of a generous mind, are infinitely preferable to the ſucceſs of ſelfiſhneſs and guilt. Let any ingenuous heart recollect its own experience, and inform us whether the mere exertion of friendſhip, compaſſion or tenderneſs, tho' ineffectual, be not attended with enjoyments ſuperior to the gratification of all the ſenſitive appetites. I dare appeal to every ſoul here preſent, which has felt ſuch kind emotions, for the

truth of this fact. We need not enlarge on the miſerable conſequences of neglected charity in public life. It is plain, that, without her benignant influence, every ſingle member of ſociety would be indifferent to all intereſt but his own. Then, inſtead of honeſty, probity, humanity, what would be the prevailing principles of action? Vile deceit, open violence, and inſidious rancour. For, if the human heart has any ſenſibility at all, it muſt be inſpired with ſome paſſions, and engaged in ſome purſuits; ſo that wherever kind or generous diſpoſitions are check'd or extirpated, there paſſions and ſentiments directly oppoſite in their nature and effects will ſpring up. Nor is the immediate bitterneſs of malice and revenge their moſt dreadful conſequence; for temporary indulgences grow to confirmed habits, and greatly diminiſh, if not intirely deſtroy our taſte for every thing elſe. Now, if our lives have been devoted to malevolent or animal gratifications, can it be imagined that, at our departure from this world, GOD will, by a miracle, change the whole

whole ſtate of our minds? What then have we to expect from the moment of death? The view is terrible, 'tis tormenting, 'tis inſupportable!——In this world our paſſions are alternately ſooth'd, or pain'd by blandiſhment or contradiction: But hereafter, who can conceive to what a height malice and revenge may be carried, by an eternal and uninterrupted ſucceſſion of diſpleaſing events. Believe me, the hotteſt material hell that can be felt or imagined, is paradiſe and pleaſure to this conſummation of wretchedneſs and deſpair.

WHAT conſiderations can divert the human mind from voluptuous, lucrative or ambitious ſchemes, if the glory of GOD, the intereſts of mankind, the preſent and eternal happineſs of every individual prove in vain? I might here urge the command and example of your dying SAVIOUR; I might recall to your attention the great principle which animated all his conduct; I might remind you of the glory and happineſs from which he deſcended;

deſcended ; I might enumerate his ſufferings, and deſcribe the horrors of his death, all which were the effects of unbounded and eternal love or charity. But of theſe, having had former occaſions to treat, let me leave you to ruminate on what has been ſaid. And may the great GOD of love bleſs theſe reflections to all the noble purpoſes of charity, through Chriſt. *Amen.*

FINIS.